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AUTHOR Ternent, William A.; Ternent, Janet A.
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ABSTRACT

This speech presents a model of human communication which integrates the existential philosophy of Martin Buber with the communication views of Jonas Salk. In his book, "The Survival of the Wisest," Salk characterizes an "Epoch A" to describe the values and behaviors of the past and an "Epoch B" to describe the necessary values and behaviors for the future if human beings are to survive. Based on Salk's theory, this speech maintains that those individuals who teach human communication have an important species-related role to play in the transition from Epoch A to Epoch B and in developing a positive theoretical base for Epoch B. It is posited that the basic qualities of human interaction/communication that Buber defines are not only compatible with Salk's definition of Epoch B but also provide a philosophical starting point for Epoch B communication theory, technique, and methodology. (MAI)

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TOWARD A COMMUNICATION THEORY FOCUSED ON HUMANKIND'S FUTURE

By

William A. Ternent, Ph.D.*
Janet A. Ternent, M.A.**

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2310 Millenium Lane
Reston, Va. 22091
(703) 860-8640

*Associate Professor, School of Communications, Department of Communication Arts and Sciences, Howard University - Washington, D.C. 20059

**Doctoral Candidate (Ed.D) in Curriculum and Instruction, West Virginia University; degrees in Education from the Ohio State University (B.A.) and Stetson University (M.A.); Consultant; teacher at Terraset Elementary School, Reston, Virginia - Fairfax County School System.

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TOWARD A HUMAN COMMUNICATION THEORY

FOCUSED ON HUMANKIND'S FUTURE

ABSTRACT

Jonas Salk in The Survival of the Wisest characterizes an "Epoch A" to describe the values and behaviors of the past and an "Epoch B" to describe the nature of necessary values and behaviors for the future if the species humankind is to survive. Epochs A and B are the two extremities of an S curve (sigmoid curve) at opposite sides of the point of inflection.

The underlying nature of major values and behaviors which Salk asserts are necessary to Epoch B is described. The authors suggest that those individuals who study and teach human communication have an important species related role to play in (1) the transition of the species from Epoch A to Epoch B, (2) the development of a positive theoretical base for Epoch B, and (3) the design of practical communication paradigms for Epoch B.

To create such a theoretical base and to translate it into useful human communication behaviors requires an openness to and acceptance of the behavior patterns and values that Salk identifies as being necessary for species survival. The authors suggest that the basic qualities of human interaction/communication that existentialist Martin Buber describes are compatible with the values and behaviors that Salk identifies for Epoch B. The authors offer a portion of Buber's philosophical base as a starting point for Epoch B communication theory, technique, and methodology. A model of human communication based on the works of Buber which integrates Epoch A and Epoch B communication views is presented.

TOWARD A HUMAN COMMUNICATION THEORY

FOCUSED ON HUMANKIND'S FUTURE

INTRODUCTION

There is no higher calling or more important work for humankind than attending to the survival of the species.

The possibility of our extinction becomes increasingly apparent as we learn more about ourselves and the natural world. It is also increasingly apparent that the problem of survival lies not in an ungrateful environment, but in our behavior related to our environment and ourselves. To paraphrase Pogo, "We have identified the problem and it is we."

In short, we openly recognize that we are pressing many limits of the natural world. And, we are beginning to recognize that through our repeated failures in dealing decisively and creatively with that recognition we are pressing our psychological limits related to private and public leadership, institutions, values and social policies. We have created a monumental crisis for the ecosystem and, through our inept social behavior in dealing with it, we are destroying our confidence that we can deal with it... in time.

There is some inadequacy in our social values and our behavior that inhibits our capacity to respond appropriately to our own data concerning the quality of our lives and the possible extinction of the species we propagate. Of course, it could also be that we are acting out some psychotic or biologically based death wish. But, if we accept the notion that our problem lies in some inadequacies of our values and our behaviors, then we must focus on questions such as "What sort of values and behaviors may be adequate to achieve a future for the species"? "How do we achieve them?" and "Just what does that have to do with we professionals in human communication?"

We believe that those of us who study and teach human communication have a crucial role to play in the species' survival scenario. The following discussion seeks to inspect the nature of values and behavior which are supportive of humankind's continued evolution. We then turn to a discussion of the kinds of human communication necessary to achieve and operationalize such values and behavior and question the appropriateness of much of what we now teach and study concerning human communication. Finally, we suggest some steps which might lead us to a communication theory focused on humankind's future.

POINTS OF DEPARTURE

A Context --In The Survival of the Wisest (1) Jonas Salk discusses the past, the present and the future of humankind as a species.

From biology, he notes the occurrence of an S curve[1] (Figure 1, Curve I) when many species, bacteria, cells, etc., exceed ecological balance with their environment. He also observes that there are species which very nearly annihilate themselves through their behavior in the face of such excesses (Figure 1, Curve II). He notes that among existing species on planet earth, humankind is perhaps the only one which has not been fully tested for survival.

Salk sees humankind's test for survival as immediately ahead. Noting that human population growth rates and behavior in relation to environmental potentials approximate those of other biological species prior to a dramatic change and subsequent leveling (or decline), he sees the Epoch A portion of the sigmoid curve as having been completed. Humankind now finds itself at the point of inflection of the sigmoid curve where dramatic value changes --and behavior changes-- must occur if the Epoch B portion of the curve is to be realized. This means responding to

[1]Epochs A and B are the two extremities of an S curve (sigmoid curve) at opposite sides of the point of inflection. Epoch A is characterized by expotential growth which frequently outstrips the natural environment. Epoch B is characterized by declining growth toward a plateau or condition of stability which is consistent with the limits of the natural environment.

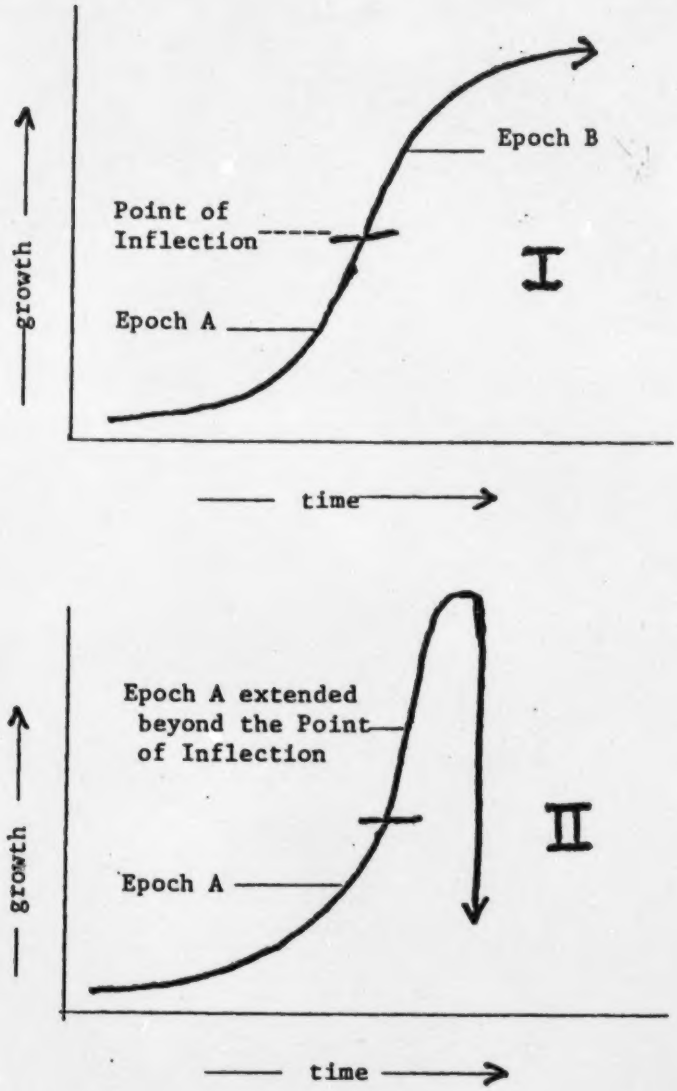

Figure 1: S (sigmoid curves illustrating (curve I) species which respond to environmental limitations, and (curve II) those which fail to respond.

the limits of nature and adopting a manner which is coalescent and supportive of continuing evolution.

As Salk observes, the human species is capable of manipulating biologic evolution through its decisions concerning the environment and the organism itself. The Survival of The Wisest questions if, as the most adaptable of the species, we will be "wise" enough to modify our behavior and achieve survival without the necessity of nature invoking an appropriate disaster to make up for our lack of self control (there is considerable evidence from biology that nature is capable and prone to do so when species exhibit insufficient "wisdom").[2]

Humankind, then, is at a turning point. The species has built and lived a set of values and behaviors which were appropriate during Epoch A where survival demanded expansion, exercising control over nature, and a competitive win-lose approach to the business of living in a seemingly limitless although hostile natural environment. Now, the species must reprogram its values and its behavior to match the limitations of the environment and to achieve the Epoch B portion of the curve which is necessary for species survival.

The Challenge -- Value and behavior modification as a species is dependent upon communicative activity and style. Thus, those of us who study and teach human communication have an important role to perform in helping the species through the point of inflection and in the synthesis and successful implementation of Epoch B values and behaviors.

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[2] Biologic "intelligence" seems to operate among various non-human species which results in behaviors atuned to the environment and which support survival. However, the human species has demonstrated a capacity through its "metabiologic" capacities for thought, conceptualization, synthesis, learned behavior, and the exercise of choice to override (at least on a temporary basis) various environmental forces which otherwise interact with the human biologic organism to moderate species excesses in relation to its natural environment.

However, many of our theories, models, and methodologies are steeped in an unconscious perpetuation of Epoch A values and behaviors. If we accept that we have an important species related role to play in moving humankind toward and through Epoch B, we must willingly open ourselves to views and approaches to communication which may be repugnant to our Epoch A intellects.

Salk feels that species humankind is programmed for survival. We share his optimism and believe that those concerned with human communication are capable of setting aside favored positions and "truths" of Epoch A which are not appropriate for Epoch B and helping the species construct its paradigm for survival. But doing so will require human communication styles which are equal to the challenge.

EPOCH B VALUES AND BEHAVIOR

To define appropriate human communication styles for Epoch B we must ask: What is the essence of the values and behaviors required for Epoch B? Further, we must understand the essential characteristics of Epoch A behavior, the imbalance created by it, and the nature of the change required to achieve Epoch B.

The Epoch A Mentality -- Salk characterizes humankind's Epoch A values and behavior as:

1. Heavily focused on group welfare to the extent that the realization of the unique potential of the individual in the group has been diminished;
2. Heavily oriented to competitive, win-lose, either-or type of activity and outcomes in relating to both the natural environment and in intraspecies encounters;
3. Containing an implicit assumption of limitlessness of the environment.

These values and behaviors were essential to survival as the species evolved from pre-tribal early man to present social and physical states. They have also resulted in an imbalance within the human organism and between the human organism and its environment. It is with that imbalance as the

species plays out its immutable natural evolutionary tendency that we must be concerned. To understand the character of the imbalance and its impact on the question of survival one must deal with the unfolding of both the biological and the metabiological capacities of humankind.

The biological essence of humankind, Salk says, is found in the genetic system which is composed of (1) genetic material (egg and sperm cells) and (2) somatic material (all other differentiated cells of the body). The function of genetic material is to pass information on to the next generation. The function of somatic material is to control and regulate each of the cells as they perform their particular role in the organism as a whole (1, page 35).

Genetic material may be considered "Species Substance" since it carries hereditary instructions from generation to generation. Somatic material may be considered to be "Individual Substance" since it relates to the functioning of the individual organism in its environment. Both of these substances are found in all cells of the organism and, while they are two separate systems, they are interdependent.

The important lessons to be learned from the biologic essence of the organism are: 1) Explicit dualisms exist, which may appear to be in conflict, but the separation is one of function and not of existence; one cannot exist separate from the other (i.e., genetic-somatic, life-death; and the other dualisms one may note as surrounding a purely biologic reality). 2) These elements of biologic essence contain the total genetic potential of the individual organism. The extent to which that potential is realized depends upon the coalescence of the genetic and somatic segments of its biological essence. And, it is upon combination of the unique genetic potentials of individuals which the genetic potential of future individuals is based in lessor, equal or greater form.

In addition to this biologic essence, Salk suggests a "metabiologic essence". While it is biologically dependent, the metabiological goes beyond the biological and appears to be unique to humankind. Its essence is revealed in the ability to

think, to take intuitive leaps, to synthesize, to learn, to create, to discern existence of choices and to make them.

The metabiological essence to humankind (or man's purpose) is an analog of the biological essence of humankind (or nature's purpose). That is, there remains the dualism which is found in biology: the striving for realization of the innate genetic potential of each individual of the species; and, the striving to mediate between realization of that potential and the enviornment.

The genetically based potential of the individual is realized to the extent permitted by the somatically based behavior of the individual. The genetic potential is realized in accordance with the basic evolutionary laws of nature. However, it is realized only when somatically controlled experiences of life which mediate between it and the physical and social environment permit its development or unfolding.

The metabiologic essence of humankind is the distinguishing characteristic which separates it from other species. It is revealed in the capacity of humankind to be concerned with the quality of life, with the aesthetic, and with strictly "human" concerns.

Nature's immutable movement is toward the evolutionary development of the capacity for species survival. Now, Salk states, the modal Epoch A behaviors and values which were formerly essential to species survival threaten survival in the future. As evidence he cites the ecological imbalance we have created. He also considers our present focus on group welfare and group values to be counter to the evolutionary thrust of nature since individuals are restrained by society from realizing their unique potentials.

Time of Transition--As a species we are at the point of inflection between Epochs A and B. Change in our values and behavior is required, and such things as the

impact of past behavior on the natural environment and the denial or reversal of traditional values and behaviors by youth, etc., are evidence of basic changes which are taking place. Such changes demonstrate the metabiological evolution of the species through its sensing of alternatives and the choice of behaviors related to them. They also demonstrate the existence of genetic programs which have been developing over time and which are just emerging. Combined biologic and metabiologic "wisdom" is essential for species survival, and it is in such changes that Salk sees evidence that humankind is programmed for survival and capable of evolving Epoch B values and behaviors. The question is whether humankind will choose to accept such alternatives and to make difficult basic changes or whether humankind will choose to override them in favor of a continuation of the Epoch A mentality.

The Epoch B Mentality--Salk characterizes Epoch B values and behavior as:

1) Striving to bring about realization of the unique genetically based potential of each individual;
2) Oriented toward multiple-win activity and outcomes in relating to both the natural environment and in intraspecies encounters;
3) Focusing on self-restraint of the individual in relating to both the natural environment and in species relations.

Healthy values and behaviors for humankind are those which are in harmony with the evolutionary tendency of nature. The continued assertation of Epoch A values and behaviors by many individuals in the face of substantial evidence that such behaviors threaten species survival is an indication of species imbalance. Similarly, emerging emphasis on Epoch B type values and behaviors by other individuals is an indication of intrinsic health within the species which points to continued evolution toward some unspecified future state.

Survival, to Salk, depends upon humankind's ability to recognize and embrace Epoch B values and behaviors which are supportive of both continued biologic and metabiologic emergence. It is in the development of a coalescent relationship between nature's biologic and man's metabiologic purposes that humankind may realize its potential both as individuals and as a species. And, it is only through a coalescent mentality that humankind may realize the Epoch B portion of the sigmoid curve.

HUMAN COMMUNICATION FOR EPOCH B

Achieving Epoch B requires modal human values and behaviors which stress the uniqueness of each individual, self-expression motivated by being self-responsible (or in Salk's words, self-restrained), and a multiple-win as differentiated from win-lose approach to human activity. Such values have special implications regarding human communication, and are central concerns of philosopher Martin Buber (2) and educator Ivan Illich (3). Consequently, their insights are a useful starting point for establishing a philosophic base from which persons concerned with human communication might construct useful theory for Epoch B.

The basic tenents of Buber's philosophy spring from a recognition of the uniqueness of each human being. He encourages all persons to know themselves, to express their individuality, and to respond to their own personal needs. It is a philosophy that demands action, self responsibility and self restraint. Buber is particularly sensitive to the human need to communicate and to understand intended meanings. For him, the value of the individual is best expressed when the person is understood. Ivan Illich is also sensitive to the importance of and problems in human communication.

The model portrayed herein (figure 2) is drawn from Buber's thorough and sensitive philosophy of which the reflections on communication described here are only a part. Illich's insight into communication silences is from an essay that fits easily into and compliments Buber's notions. Within Buber's basic philosophic framework of concern for individuals realizing their potentials, and his reflection that the resultant value of each individual is best expressed when the person is understood by another, he discusses five different levels of communication:

1. Persuasion and Propaganda;
2. Superficial Dialogue;
3. Genuine Dialogue;
4. Technical Dialogue;
5. Empathy

Of these, three are emphasized as basic differentiated levels of human interaction: (1) Persuasion/Propoganda, (2) Superficial Dialogue, and (3) Genuine Dialogue and are indicated in the model (Figure 2) by horizontal areas bordered by broken lines. Technical Dialogue and Empathy are not central to Buber's basic thesis. Because they exist as important communication levels they are identified and included in the model, but they are not integrated with the reflections of Illich. Vertically in the figure are three intersecting columns denoted by solid lines. These three columns are:

Left Column - Representations of Buber's expressions concerning human communication.

Right Column - Representations of Illich's insights on communication silences.

Center Column--A representation of the intermingling of Buber's and Illich's insights which integrate verbal and non-verbal levels of human communication.

Persuasion and Propaganda --are dismissed by Buber as something less than truly human communication since their purposes are not rooted in concern for the other

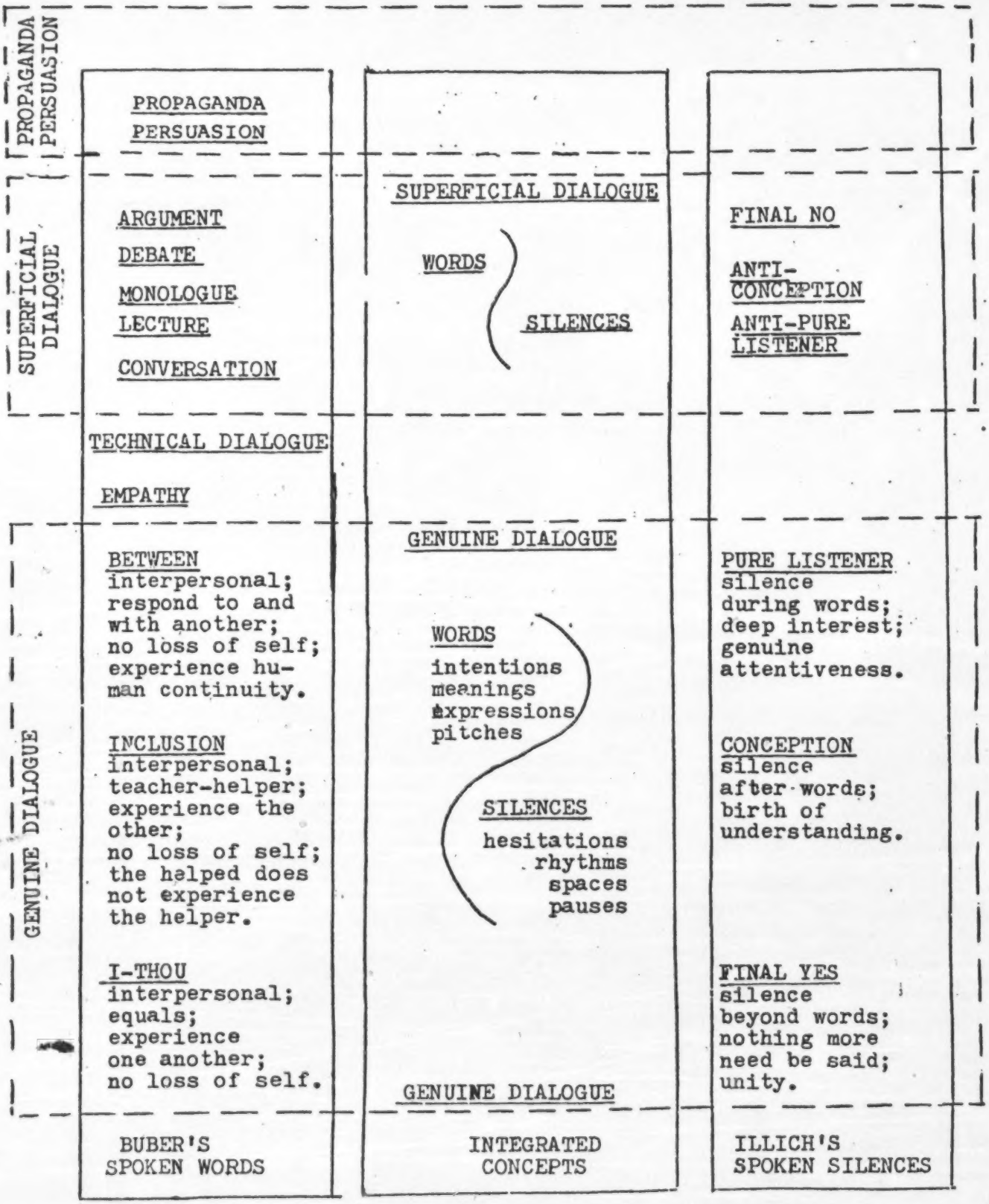

Figure 2: Model of Buber's Communication Philosophy

person(s) but solely in the purposes and interests of the persuader/propagandist. There is no genuine concern for interaction, interpersonal exchange, understanding, or individual growth. There is only concern for acceptance, action, and desired behavior. Indeed, the most efficient persuasion and propaganda occurs when there is no questioning, reflection, or ideational interaction on the part of those being persuaded.

Superficial Dialogue-- to Buber includes a variety of common communication paradigms and strategies, all of which focus on understanding through varying degrees of interpersonal exchange. Superficial dialogue, or monologue as he often refers to it, is a state wherein one communicates but is never able to recognize that the other person is not himself or herself; the speaker's own personal identity is always a part of those spoken to. Superficial dialogue is focused on acceptance of posited ideas and the realization of desired behaviors on the part of the person who is the object of the communication. There is little focus or concern for the other's growth or the expression of his or her internalized understandings. Superficial dialogue occurs whenever the communicator holds the idea being communicated as more important than the person who is the interactant in the communication.

Technical Dialogue --rests between Genuine Dialogue and Superficial Dialogue. Buber notes that there is dialogue that is instigated solely for objective understandings. Such dialogue is neither genuine or superficial since it neither objectifies or propagandizes those in the interaction. Thus, beyond identifying it, Buber ignores this practical and routine form of communication.

Empathy -- occurs when the self is transposed into the dynamics of another. In this transposition the self is lost, temporarily. At any time there is a loss of self, genuine dialogue cannot exist, according to Buber. Yet, after empathy, when the self is whole, genuine communication has occurred. Thus, one can become the recipient of another's meaning through prose, poetry, philosophy, art, etc. While

Buber rejects the action of empathy, he does reflect on the potential of genuine communication in the result. For that reason Empathy is placed separately between Superficial and Genuine Dialogue in the model.

Genuine Dialogue -- to Buber includes several realizable but relatively infrequent levels of interpersonal interaction/communication. It is identifiable by the genuine valuing and concern for the other individual and that individual's meanings or identity, or development of meaning or identity. At the same time one's own identity and meaning are never submerged, denigrated, or demoted in the communication process.

The I-Thou intersect of "Genuine Dialogue" in the model is in Buber's terms the highest, most intimate form of communication. It can exist only between people who meet together as equals. It is an intense experience that happens only when circumstances in, around, and between persons is such that it can happen. Neither can force it, both must be open and willing for it to happen. "I-Thou" is based on mutual trust that opens each to experiencing the totality of the other. It is the ultimate of sharing, the complete and total understanding of the other's meanings as if they were one's own. Yet, one does not give up one's own meanings in order to embrace the other's.

Of lesser intimacy than "I-Thou" but still in the realm of genuine dialogue, is the act of Inclusion. Anyone in the position to help another can experience inclusion when their concern becomes totally responsive to the person needing help. In terms of the teacher, it happens when one is able to experience the student's learning as if learning it oneself in the same way as the learner. However, one has distance at the same time which allows the use of one's ability to offer only the specific help needed. In Buber's terms it is when the teacher experiences the learner's position that he can be said to truly teach.

The helper experiences the other with no loss of self. The one needing help does not (can not) experience the position of the helper. Opportunities for inclusion depend on the sensitivity and the willingness of an individual to respond to others' genuine need of help.

The communication of the Between is the third area of genuine dialogue identified by Buber. As with I-Thou and Inclusion the Between uses language as a tool to aid in establishing a relationship. The Between, however, is not only a relationship of persons here and now, but includes a shared relationship with those who will follow. The Between communicates the flow, the sense of belonging to and responsibility toward the future generations. It is the human relationship of a person with another person or persons with full recognition of their potential as individuals and their responsibility as members of all humankind.

Spoken Silences--The positive silencies as described by Illich are the Pure Listener, Conception, and Final Yes. These three facilitate the experiencing of genuine dialogue in all possibilities: Between, Inclusion, and I-Thou. (See intersect of Genuine Dialogue and Illich's Spoken Silences in Figure 2.)

The first silence is that of the Pure Listener. This is the silence of deep interest, of caring, of genuine attentiveness. It is the silence that allows the communion of understanding. This silence is threatened by the indifference, disinterest, and self interest occuring in superficial dialogue which Illich calls "anti-pure listener".

The second silence (Conception), is the silence that follows words, that nourishes the intent, and allows the other person(s) time to understand. It is the silence that awaits the birth of understanding. However, Illich states, it is also the silence where words die during superficial dialogue (anti-conception.)

Such "death" of understanding may occur in superficial dialogue as a result of "hurry", "inappropriate action", "cheapness", and "mass production". It may also be due to the "artificial flower" which is the claim of understanding when it has not really occurred. It may also be due to the silence of "brewing agression that is used to divide rather than to unite[5] (3, pages 32-35)."

The third silence is the Final Yes that goes beyond words. In its positive strength it unites forever, it is the unity of love. Its negative aspects in superficial dialogue divide forever or become what Illich calls the "Final No".

Epoch A and Superficial Dialogue --Buber considers all forms of human communication other than Genuine Dialogue to be superficial or persuasive. Included among them are most of the communication styles, strategies and behaviors which have been and remain the core of communication education and research. Those specifically discussed by Buber are propaganda, persuasion, argument, debate, lecture, monologue, and conversation. Each of these supports, enhances and tends to perpetuate Epoch A values and behaviors.

Not all which has been or is taught or studied is clearly of an Epoch A intellect. For instance, those who exclude from persuasion those forms where alternatives are not available and where free choice does not exist, are certainly not operating in the pre-"superficial dialogue" area where Buber places "persuasion". In short, not all behavior during Epoch A has been of an Epoch A intellect. As Salk notes, the full range of Epoch A and B values and behaviors may be observed during Epoch A or B with the Epoch being identified by the basic thrust of values and behaviors exhibited. Similarly, Buber notes that "Genuine Dialogue" on a frequent or model basis is rare for individuals in contemporary living. The difficulty of creating such intimate, open and caring interaction amid Epoch A expectations and interpersonal styles is not hard to understand. However, as Buber also notes, Genuine Dialogue is not an interaction which lends itself to

routine practice. Indeed, for many of our functional human communication needs it could easily be considered unnecessary or inappropriate. We might, however, view communication behavior, note its basic thrust, and thus characterize human interactions. Clearly, our Epoch has been "A" based upon Salk's definitions. During it, our human interactions have been "persuasive" and superficial" viewed through Buber rubric.

Epoch B and Genuine Dialogue --For Salk, the achievement of Epoch B will require "...a deep consciousness of others as well as ourselves, enabling us to understand what others mean, and to relate to them on the basis not of what they say but for what they mean...(1, page 81)". Both Buber in "Genuine Dialogue and Illich in "Positive Silences" are dealing with communication at that deeply personal level. Salk lists some of the values and behaviors needed to meet Epoch B requirements as: intuition, feeling, subjectiveness, differentiation, cooperation, and double-win. The Buber model demands similar values and behaviors for Genuine Dialogue.

It is important to note that neither Buber's Genuine Dialogue nor Salk's Epoch B calls for, requires, or expects a homogeneity of human values or behaviors. Both recognize that the full range of positions and approaches (and needs for them) exist potentially within each individual and within the species in all segments of time. Buber recognizes Genuine Dialogue as an important state for health, growing, self-realizing individual. Salk recognizes the need for similar qualities for not only the fullest possible realization of each individual's potential, but for the very survival of the species. Both, however, suggest that the modal character of our social inventions repress the development of such capacities. Both call for a lessening of such repression.

If we think in terms of Epoch B values and behaviors and their importance to the individual and the species, those of us involved in human communication must ask some serious questions about the appropriateness of much of what we teach and much of our research. Our teaching and our research are heavily focused on

communication as a combative, manipulative science or art and very minimally on communication as a science or art for developing coalescivity among members of the human species. We might speculate that we are preparing for fellows to perpetuate Epoch A values and behaviors which could lead to our common disaster.

We would, then, be well advised to carefully investigate the implications of our teachings and our research in terms of humankind's future rather than humankind's past. Buber's writing offers us a well expressed view of where we have been, where we are, and where we might aspire to go in preparing humankind for its future. I could serve as the initiating base for developing a human communication skills essential for Epoch B.

CONCLUSION: MOVING TOWARD EPOCH B IN HUMAN COMMUNICATION THEORY, RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

We have posited that the business of attending to the survival of the species is the best work of humankind. We have accepted the analogies, hypotheses and notions of Jonas Salk as presented in The Survival of the Wisest as a realistic and as a cogent description of the combined biologic and metabiologic reality of the dilemmas faced by humankind. We have suggested that serious students and teachers of communication have a vital role in the synthesis of new human values and behaviors during the transition from Epoch A to Epoch B and for support of the species in traversing Epoch B. We have suggested that much existing "theory" and practice in human communication is Epoch A oriented and thus contraindicated for Epoch B. And, we have suggested some of the notions of those such as Martin Buber and Ivan Illich as useful starting places for a communication philosophy upon which an Epoch B communication theory, methodology and practice could be developed.

The mere potential of the reality in what Salk suggests and the implications of it for human communication calls for some high placement in the priorities and on the agendas of persons dealing in human communication. At the very least, some

pointed investigations seem essential:

1. The full investigation of the implication of Salk's observations, insights, and hypotheses for functional (such as information theory and systems theory) and categorical (such as debate, persuasion, small group) human communication views.
2. An interdisciplinary investigation of the social, psychological, social-psychological and cultural implications of Salk's views (with particular concern for the role(s) of communication).
3. An interdisciplinary investigation of the efficacy and vigor of Salk's views concerning the human situation (in such areas as economics, organizations, technology).
4. An appraisal of views of human communication for the purpose of constructing new or revised communication theories, models, methodologies and practices supportive of the Epoch B intellect.

In a sense, our willingness to devote professional and intellectual energies and resources to such efforts will be a metabiological answer of nature's "wisest" species regarding its own possible extinction or survival.

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